Fact Sheet

**Body Image**

# What is Body Image?

Body image refers to your relationship with your physical self. It involves four elements:

1. How you see your body or *perceptual body image*. This may or may not be an accurate representation of how you look.
2. The way you feel about your body or *affective body image*. This could be positive, negative or in between.
3. The way you think about your body or *cognitive body image.*  This includes whether you think about your body shape and weight and how often.
4. How you behave as a result of your body image or *behavioural body image.* For example, do you avoid certain activities because of how you think about your body?

In other words, body image is:

* the mental picture that you have of your body
* how you think and feel about your body as a result of this
* and any behaviours that are the result of the way you feel about your body.

# Positive Body Image

People of all shapes, sizes, and abilities can have or develop positive body image. Positive or healthy body image is when you:

* mainly feel good about your body
* understand that there is more to you than your physical appearance
* see yourself as you are
* feel positive and comfortable in your own body
* have positive self-talk
* avoid comparing yourself with others.

Having a positive body image can improve self-esteem and how you look after your body. You will also have a lot more mental energy to focus on other things.

Having a positive body image does not necessarily mean you love all of your body all of the time. It is normal to feel good about some parts of your body and less good about others, particularly during adolescence. Adolescence is a time of major changes in your body, your emotions and your relationships. This can affect how you feel about your body.

# Body Image in Australia

Body dissatisfaction is having negative thoughts and feelings about your body. A 2017 survey found almost half (45%) of Australians aged 18-30 were dissatisfied with their appearance. Almost three quarters (73%) of all adults wished they could change the way they look and two thirds (66.6%) of adults had experienced bullying or teasing for their appearance at some stage.[[1]](#endnote-1)

Body image is a significant issue for young people in Tasmania. Over 75% of young Tasmanians are concerned about body image. Females are more likely than males to be concerned about body image.[[2]](#endnote-2)

A survey[[3]](#endnote-3) of 14-15 year old Australians found that half of the girls and one in five of the boys who responded had been afraid of gaining weight in the last four weeks and that one in four girls and one in 10 boys restricted food to control their weight.

**For more information and support:**

[Butterfly Foundation](https://butterfly.org.au/body-image/body-image-explained/)

[National Eating Disorders Collaboration](https://www.nedc.com.au/eating-disorders/eating-disorders-explained/body-image/)

[Kids Helpline](https://kidshelpline.com.au/teens/issues/developing-positive-body-image)

1. The Butterfly Foundation, *Insights in Body Esteem: A survey of Australians’ experience of body image and its impact on day to day life,* viewed 8 October 2019, < https://thebutterflyfoundation.org.au/assets/Uploads/Insights-into-Body-Esteem-Report-PDF3.pdf> [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Carlisle, E., Fildes, J., Hall, S., Hicking, V., Perrens, B. and Plummer, J. 2018, Youth Survey Report 2018, Mission Australia [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. O’Connor, M., Warre, D., Daraganova, G., *Eating problems in mid adolescence*, viewed 8 October 2019 <https://aifs.gov.au/publications/eating-problems-mid-adolescence>, Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2018 [↑](#endnote-ref-3)